

MASTER'S THESIS

What is revealed through errors?: a study of Hong Kong primary ESL learners

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WHAT IS REVEALED THROUGH ERRORS? A
STUDY OF HONG KONG PRIMARY ESL
LEARNERS

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Abstract

In second language learning, errors are unavoidable among learners. However, errors actually indicate the progress or difficulty in learning. Current research on errors made by second language learners at elementary levels is rather limited in Hong Kong context. In consequence of this lack, the present study is conducted as one about English errors which are produced by some local Primary 4 pupils. This study aims to explore the nature of primary 4 ESL learners' language errors and attempts to trace the possible origins of the collected errors which frequently occur in the English writings. The error analysis is made by classifying the collected data into two main broad categories: intralingual and interlingual errors. Moreover, it also attempts to investigate which kinds of factor have a stronger influence on the learners' English writings. It also attempts to give suggestions on the present teaching for minimizing language errors produced by ESL learners. 40 subjects from two primary 4 classes were chosen to participate in this study. They were asked to write two compositions, which were used as the data for this study. The identified errors were classified into seven error categories and further down into twenty-one sub-categories. Each category/subcategory were analyzed, examined and explained from the perspectives of two theoretical perspectives: interlingual and intralingual errors on the basis of their deviant features and structures in the target language. The results show that interlingual errors are the major kind of error that primary 4 learners of second language had. The most significant observation is that errors can have more than one source. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish interlingual and intralingual errors, and even more difficult to identify the different types of errors that Richards describes. This is because his classification does not include all common and different deviant features and structures of the target language that second language learners have. However, as an attempt to deal with the problem of identifying sources of errors,

Richards' intralingual error classification is an initial step which paves the way for future studies. It is hoped that the findings of the current study can help primary teachers in Hong Kong to obtain a more systematic understanding of the sources of errors produced by Hong Kong senior primary students.

撮要

在學習第二語言的過程中，語言錯誤的產生是無可避免。不過，學習者的錯誤實際上可以反映他們的學習進度和難度。對香港小學裏第二語言學習者的語言錯誤情況目前鮮有研究。因應這一匱乏，故本論文旨在研究香港小四學生語言錯誤的性質，並且嘗試探究寫作中常見錯誤的可能原因。論文對錯誤地分析是把收集到的素材分歸入「語際錯誤」和「語內錯誤」兩個主要方面。此外，本論文亦探究了哪些因素對現今小學生作文練習有較大影響。論文亦希望透過是次研究給現今的教學工作提出一些建議，從而減少學生在寫作中犯錯的機會。

40 個來自兩個小四班級的被試參予了是次研究。要求他們寫兩篇作文，以用作本研究的素材。所辨認出來的錯誤分成七個主要類目，然後進一步細分入二十一個子類目中。根據錯誤偏離目的語的特徵和結構，對每個錯誤類目/子類目都從兩個理論角度作分析、討論和解釋。結果顯示，語際錯誤是小四學生主要的錯誤。此外，最有意義的觀察結果是，學生錯誤的來源可以多於一個。研究還發現，語際錯誤和語內錯誤有時很難分辨，此外，要識別 Richards 描寫的各種不同的錯誤則更加困難。這是因為他的分類方法未能完全包括第二語言學習者偏離目的語的普遍和不同的特徵及結構。不過，作為處理辨認學生錯誤來源的一種嘗試，Richards 的語內錯誤分類方法是為將來研究鋪平道路的第一步。本人希望是次研究的發現有助香港的小學教師對香港高年級小學生英語錯誤的來源有較有比較系統的理解。

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